

The N-Judah Chronicles

October 9, 2009

Greg Dewar

Talking About Muni Safety and Crime with Sup. Chu, the SFMTA, the SFPD and More!



There's no denying that Muni safety and crime are of concern to citizens right now. What with the much-publicized fight on YouTube, the gang-related incident that sent a young person to the hospital on Monday, and the many other incidents we've had lately, people are getting worried. So what's anyone *doing* about it?

Today we had a few steps in the right direction. Rather than take the cynic's view of "oh f*ck this nothing works Muni sucks blah blah blah" (which never accomplished anything, as far as I can tell), I've decided that we take the SFMTA, the SFPD and Sup. Chu at their word and simply keep a vigilant eye on events as they unfold.

The first part of the press conference was devoted to LRV passenger safety, with a focus on the N-Judah and Taraval lines.

Loyal Readers will recall that a recent incident involving a passenger struck by a car while de-boarding the N sparked a rather spirited discussion here last month.

Sup. Chu's office, working with the SFMTA, came up with a partial plan to increase driver awareness with the yellow stickers (pictured at right) which remind drivers that they need to yield to people de-boarding the train. Sup. Chu talked about her own experience with "near misses" on the L and the number of complaints she'd received from people on this issue. Sam Lau, deputy COO of the SFMTA, pointed out that existing signage is off to the right, and that these eye-level signs for drivers on the train itself were designed to increase awareness of the law. However, it was also stressed that passengers need to be careful and be aware of their surroundings when leaving the train, also.

Captain Chignell of the Taraval Station pointed out that such education measures were only part of any solution, that engineering and enforcement of existing laws were needed if anything was going to change, and announced that the SFPD will be stepping up enforcement of traffic laws regarding drivers and LRVs, which carry at \$146 fine.

I'm taking a "wait and see" attitude with all of this myself. Stickers on LRVs alone won't be the silver bullet



that slays the safety beast, to be sure. But if the SFPD starts issuing traffic citations for people who are endangering others with their bad behavior, then I can see some hope of us not getting killed or nearly killed while leaving might happen.

In the end, though, one could post all the signs they want to tell people what they should be doing and it won't make any difference if it's not backed up by real enforcement of the law, and with drivers getting a clue about their responsibility to follow the rules of the road.

The rest of the press conference was devoted to crime on Muni. It was interesting to see how the mainstream press focused almost exclusively on whether the Muni cameras were on during Monday's savage attack on a rider of the 9 San Bruno (they were and the SFPD is using them to ID suspects and are asking for witnesses to come forward as well) and in general. However, the moment I asked a question about the years of cuts to Muni's budget and the effect hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts might have on maintaining the surveillance system, the entire press corps literally packed up and left.

To his credit, Muni spokesman Judson True said simply that while Muni, like every agency, has had cuts, that was no excuse for the systems not working, and that they were committed to getting them up and running ASAP. However, I wasn't asking it so much to give Muni an excuse so much as I was trying to get into the conversation the idea that you can't make zillions of cuts and send money to the Mayor's office or to other departments via bogus work orders and not expect something to screw up. But none of the "real" press wanted to talk about that - they mostly just asked about cameras, and about that incident on the 20 Columbus everyone's talking about.

That last bit is a bit annoying since it's not like people haven't been reporting incidents like these for years, documenting them on video or in print, and yet for some reason, the local media, especially TV, has really gone gaga over it. ABC7 did a report six months ago that had plenty of similar incidents, and yet you didn't see the outpouring of press coverage like you're seeing now.

I think the important thing is to simply hold everyone at their word. We always hear lots of Good Ideas, and that's only part of the battle - it's the follow up that matters. That's up to all of us as the owner/riders of Muni, and if we don't start demanding some accountability, then ultimately it's our fault if the system we own isn't working. We wouldn't have had today's press conference if people weren't saying something, and we won't have a better Muni if we let cynical bullsh!t get in the way of demanding people do what needs to be done.

[Streetsblog](#), and pretty much every local news outlet was there, so you can compare notes and see what made it on TV and what did not...

Link to photos of press conference:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/gdewar/sets/72157622426955745/>

http://www.njudahchronicles.com/2009/10/talking_about_muni_safety_and_crime_with.html